

# SHENOUTE THE MONK: THE EARLY MONASTIC CAREER OF SHENOUTE THE ARCHIMANDRITE

STEPHEN EMMEL \*

Since my colleague Tito Orlandi spoke in his presentation at this symposium about "the forgotten names" in Coptic monastic literature, I may note that the subject of my own contribution is also one such forgotten name. But in this case there is the difference that the name "Shenoute" was discovered by European orientalists already some 350 years ago, so that his name has long since ceased to be counted as forgotten. To be sure, in Egypt Shenoute's name was never forgotten. He has always been one of the Coptic Church's most revered saints. But up until the year 1670 his name truly was forgotten outside of Egypt — or at least in Europe.<sup>1</sup>

Actually, one might well ask if Shenoute's name was ever known in Europe to begin with. I can reply that one Coptic

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<sup>1</sup> On the discovery of Shenoute by Western scholarship, see Stephen Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus* (2 vols.; Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium [Subsidia]; Leuven, in press) §§ 2.2-2.4. (This publication will be a revised version of my 1993 Yale University doctoral dissertation of the same title.)

encomium on Shenoute reports that his fame during his lifetime did spread as far as Rome, where a work of his "on the exit from the body" is said to have been read aloud on some occasion — whether in Coptic, Greek, or Latin is not recorded.<sup>2</sup> But apart from this one statement, the truth of which one might or might not be inclined to accept, there is no evidence to suggest that Shenoute ever gained any significant renown outside of Egypt, or any renown at all to the north and west of the Mediterranean Sea. Even his attendance at the Council of Ephesus in 431 is really documented only in his own writings,<sup>3</sup> and Syriac literature — to the best of my inexpert knowledge — knows only a version of the typically hagiographic *Life of Shenoute*,<sup>4</sup> as well as a prayer that Syriac tradition attributes to him.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> É. Amélineau, *Monuments pour servir à l'histoire de l'Égypte chrétienne* (Mémoires publiés par les membres de la mission archéologique française au Caire 4; Paris 1888-1895) 244; cf. Georg Zoega, *Catalogus Codicum Copticorum Manuscriptorum Qui in Museo Borgiano Velitis Adversantur* (Rome 1810; repr. ed. Hildesheim and New York 1973) 379-380. The work mentioned (εἰς τὸν ἐξὸς πύχωνα τῆς ψυχῆς) is not specifically identifiable in the corpus of Shenoute's transmitted works.

<sup>3</sup> In legendary and rather vague form, his attendance is also reported in the Bohairic *Life of Shenoute* §§ 128-130 (ed. Johannes Leipoldt, *Simulii Archimandritae Vita et Opera Omnia* [3 vols. (numbered 1, 3, 4): Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 41, 42, 73 (Copt. 1, 2, 5); Paris 1906-1913] 1:57-59; Engl. tr. David Bell, *Besa, The Life of Shenoute* [Cistercian Studies Series 73; Kalamazoo 1983] 78-79); this report is somewhat more extensive in the Arabic version of the *Life* (ed. Amélineau, *Monuments* [n. 2 above] 426-428).

<sup>4</sup> F. Nau, "Une version syriaque inédite de la Vie de Shenoute," *Revue sémitique de géographie et d'histoire ancienne* 7 (1899) 356-363; 8 (1900) 153-167, 252-265; I. Guidi, "Le traduzioni dal copto," *Nachrichten von der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften und der Georg-Augustus-Universität zu Göttingen* 1889, 49-56, at 52-56 (but this leaf is of Egyptian origin, namely from the Monastery of the Syrians in Wadi Natrun).

<sup>5</sup> F. Nau, "À propos d'une édition des œuvres de Shenoute. La version syriaque des prières de Shenoute, de Jean le Nain, de Macaire l'Égyptien et de Sérapion," *Revue de l'Orient chrétien* 12 (1907) 313-328, at 320-322; see further Michel Pezmi, "Un texte copte de la prière attribuée à Chénouti," in: *Mélanges Antoine Guillaumont. Contributions à l'étude des christianismes orientaux*, edited by René-Georges Coquin (Cahiers d'Orientalisme 20; Geneva 1988) 63-68; and Nathalie Bosson, "Un palimpseste du Musée Copte du Caire," *Muséon* 104 (1991) 5-37, esp. 5-16.

But once Shenoute's name became known to European orientalists toward the end of the seventeenth century, knowledge about him grew rapidly. Especially when manuscript fragments from the remains of his own monastery's library first began to reach Europe, near the end of the eighteenth century, it was inevitable that Shenoute would eventually emerge as an outstanding figure both in the history of Coptic literature and in the history of Egyptian monasticism. But how very little was known about Shenoute before research into the remains of his monastery's library began is shown by the decision made about 1735 by the Sacra Congregatio de Librorum Orientalium Correctione that Shenoute's name (among others) had to be omitted from the diptychs of the Uniat Coptic liturgy then being published in Rome,<sup>6</sup> because the responsible authorities could find no evidence to prove that he lived before the Council of Chalcedon, and hence they feared that he was tainted by the "schism of the adherents of Dioscorus."<sup>7</sup> Ironically, the question of Shenoute's *floruit* came later to revolve around the issue of whether or not he lived long enough even to know that the Council of Chalcedon took place, let alone to take a stance on its decisions. We know now that Shenoute's life belongs mainly to the second half of the fourth century and the first half of the fifth century, but it can be demonstrated that he did not die until the year 465, and that extreme old age, poor health, and a reclusive life deep in southern Egypt did not prevent him from being aware of the

<sup>6</sup> I assume that the publication in question is Raphael Tuki, *maxwam nrenmowt nšanašepa* (Rome 1736), which, however, I myself know only from the listing in Winifred Kammerer, *A Coptic Bibliography* (University of Michigan General Library Publications 7; Ann Arbor 1950) 85 (no. 1496), and other secondary references.

<sup>7</sup> Agostino Antonio Giorgi, *Fragmentum Evangelii S. Iohannis Graeco-Copto-Thebaticum Saeculi IV* (Rome 1789) clv: "In Liturgia Copt. S. Basilii p. 20. apud La-Croz. in *Lex Copt.*, Bonitutum, Renaudotum, aliosque commemoratur nenuw šara qenoyt nšapwšanašpwtic, *Pater noster ABBAŠ SCENUTUŠ Archimandrita*. Quod nomen ideo retentum non est in Liturgia Missalis Coptici Rom. editionis, quia, ut recte memini, nullis certis monumentis probari potuit coram amplissimis Patribus Sac. Congreg. de librorum orientalium correctione, *Serutium* Archimandritiani sanctitatis fama ante schismatis Dioscoriani tempora in Aegypto floruisse."

tumult in the Egyptian church that followed the Council of Chalcedon in 451.<sup>8</sup>

However, my focus on this occasion is not on the end of Shenoute's career, but on its beginning. For in this regard our knowledge has not only expanded significantly in recent years, but there has also been an interesting surprise. The progress has come as a result of unexpected success in the centuries-long enterprise of reconstructing the transmitted corpus of Shenoute's own writings, which we know almost exclusively from the remains of copies that belonged to his monastery when it fell to ruin during the Middle Ages. It has proved possible to reconstruct the fragmentary remains of some one hundred parchment codexes from the library (or libraries) of the so-called "White Monastery" that contain works of its most famous archimandrite.<sup>9</sup> The success of this reconstruction depended finally on recovering the bibliographical structure of the transmitted corpus, which is now seen to consist mainly of two numbered sets of volumes of collected works: nine volumes of "Canons," and eight volumes of "Discourses" (or "Logoi"). The eight volumes of *Discourses* contain a highly selective assortment of works of various sorts, whose preservation and transmission depended in the end on the monastery's liturgical needs. For the nine volumes of *Canons*, on

<sup>8</sup> On the complex topic of Shenoute's chronology, see Stephen Emmel, "From the Other Side of the Nile: Shenoute and Panopolis," in: *Perspectives on Panopolis: An Egyptian Town from Alexander the Great to the Arab Conquest. Acts from an International Symposium Held in Leiden on 16, 17 and 18 December 1998*, edited by A. Egberts, B. Muhs, and J. van der Vliet (Papyrologica Lugduno-Batava 31; Leiden etc. 2002) 95-113, at 95-99; and my *Shenoute's Literary Corpus* (n. 1 above) § 2.1.

<sup>9</sup> Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus* (n. 1 above); one may also consult my preliminary reports on this enterprise of reconstruction: "Shenoute's Literary Corpus: A Codicological Reconstruction," in: *Acts of the Fifth International Congress of Coptic Studies, Washington, 12-15 August 1992*, vol. 2, *Papers from the Sections, Problems and Prospects*, in: *Ägypten und Nubien in spätantiker und christlicher Zeit. Akten des 6. Internationalen Koptologiekongresses, Münster, 20.-26. Juli 1996*, edited by Stephen Emmel, Martin Krause, Siegfried G. Richter, and Sofia Schaten, vol. 2, *Schrifttum, Sprache und Gedankenwelt* (Sprachen und Kulturen des Christlichen Orients 6.2; Wiesbaden 1999) 109-113 (cf. in the same volume, 23-37, Tito Orlandi, "Lo studio della letteratura copta 1992-1996," at 30).

the other hand, there is compelling internal evidence that Shenoute himself compiled these works at successive stages of his life, and that they continued to be transmitted — for the purpose of regulating life in the monastery across the eight or so centuries of its existence after Shenoute's death — more or less in the form in which he compiled them. Therefore, these nine volumes provide welcome clues to the chronology of Shenoute's life.

Until recently, such chronological information about Shenoute was understood to be extremely limited. Apart from his participation with Cyril of Alexandria at the Council of Ephesus in 431, the only date in his life that was generally agreed upon was the year 385, as the date of his promotion to the head of his monastery. This date is not directly attested in any of our sources, but was argued by Johannes Leipoldt (in his foundational monograph published in 1903) on the basis of a letter written by Shenoute to a patriarch Timothy. If, as seems likely, this letter was written on the occasion of Shenoute's promotion, surely the patriarch in question is Timothy I, who was patriarch of Alexandria from 380 to 385.<sup>10</sup> I am convinced that Leipoldt was correct that Shenoute's promotion can be dated with confidence as having occurred not long before the death of Timothy I and the accession of Theophilus, that is (with a little uncertainty about the matter), in the year 385. The short letter that Shenoute wrote on that occasion to Timothy,<sup>11</sup> and an almost identical one that he then felt called upon to send to Timothy's successor,<sup>12</sup> seemed thus to be Shenoute's earliest known writings. Indeed, it was not even considered that there might have been any earlier works of Shenoute.

But now comes the surprise. The first two volumes of *Shenoute's Canons* are a compilation of works that Shenoute assembled about three years after he became head — or "father" — of the monastery, that is, in about the year 388. However, the

<sup>10</sup> Johannes Leipoldt, *Shenoute von Atripe und die Entstehung des nationalen ägyptischen Christentums* (Texte und Untersuchungen 25.1; Leipzig 1903) 43-44; but see the corrections that I have offered to Leipoldt's interpretation of the evidence, in my *Shenoute's Literary Corpus* (n. 1 above) § 2.1 n. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Leipoldt, *Opera* (n. 3 above) 3:13-14 (no. 2).

<sup>12</sup> Leipoldt, *Opera* (n. 3 above) 3:14-15 (no. 4). That the addressee of this accephalous letter is Theophilus is my own hypothesis (see n. 10 above).

two works in the first volume, *Canon 1*, certainly belong to a period *before* his promotion. This conclusion is unavoidable when one reads these works in their presently reconstructed state — which is far from complete, but nevertheless much more complete than they appear in the currently existing editions. Indeed, most of the text of these works has never been published at all, and by chance many of the most interesting and informative sections belong to the *inedita*. Hence there is as yet little or no hint in the published fragments of Shenoute that these earliest of his works document, in remarkable fashion, the incidents that led simultaneously to the downfall of Shenoute's predecessor and to Shenoute's own rise to prominence as a possible successor.<sup>13</sup>

Having mentioned Shenoute's immediate predecessor, I must clarify immediately that this man was not — as has long been thought — Pcol, who was the founder and first father of the monastery. Rather, Shenoute's predecessor was a second father, whose name really has been forgotten, perhaps irretrievably so.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> I have discussed the contents of *Canons 1* and *2* preliminarily in *Shenoute's Literary Corpus* (n. 1 above) §§ 12.1-2; cf. "Shenoute and Panopolis" (n. 8 above) 95-96. In citing Shenoute's works below, I give, first, a reference to the relevant White Monastery codex (siglum XC, for example), as reconstructed in *Shenoute's Literary Corpus* § 6.2 (see also § 3.2.1, for a description of the system of reference by codex, and § 15.2, table 89, for the reconstructed order of the surviving fragments of *Canon 1*); and second, I give a reference to a publication of the text. In the case of unpublished texts, I give the collection call number of the manuscript (see *Shenoute's Literary Corpus* § 3.2.3 for a description of this reference system) and a provisional transcription (from microfilms).

<sup>14</sup> I may note here that volume 2 of Shenoute's *Canons* includes several fragments that have long been attributed to Shenoute's successor, Besa, on the basis of references to two previous fathers, since it used to be thought that in Shenoute's monastery only Besa could refer to two previous fathers, namely Pcol and Shenoute. The basis for revising the attributions of these fragments is in the first instance codicological (see *Shenoute's Literary Corpus* [n. 1 above] §§ 6.2.1 and 12.1-2, esp. at nn. 503-505), but recognizing these fragments as early works of Shenoute, in which he refers to Pcol and a second father who preceded Shenoute himself, leads to a far more satisfactory interpretation of their meaning, and a far more interesting one. For the works in *Canon 2* thus give us insight into a critical period in the early part of Shenoute's tenure as head of the monastery, with significant repercussions for his position there and for his own understanding of that position (see further below, with nn. 59-60).

This man succeeded Pcol sometime during the 370s and served as father of the monastery for ten years, probably from 375 to 385. How old was Shenoute at that time? I believe we may accept as at least approximately correct the one piece of documentary evidence that we have for the year of Shenoute's birth. This piece of evidence is a twelfth- or thirteenth-century inscription from Shenoute's monastery that states that he was born in the (Egyptian) year 348-349.<sup>15</sup> If he died on 1 July 465, as I believe, and was at that time 118 years old, as Coptic tradition records — and which I also believe to be at least approximately correct — then he would have to have been born as early as 346-347, which is only two years earlier than the date recorded by the inscription. Coptic tradition records that Shenoute entered Pcol's monastery at age 9, while we know from Shenoute's own statements that he was already a monk by the year 371-372, which means that when he became a monk he could hardly have been much older than his mid-20s, at the most. And in any case, when he became the third father of the monastery in 385, he was approaching his fortieth year of life.

The monastery of which I am speaking is located in the low desert near the edge of the cultivated land, across the river Nile from the Upper Egyptian metropolis Panopolis, which the Egyptians called Shmin and which is known today as Akhmim. The monastery was organized by its founder, Pcol, on the Pachomian model, but it did not belong formally to the Pachomian system. We have very little evidence about Pcol's activities, but it seems likely that he and another man, Pshoi (founder of an independent monastery nearby, the so-called "Red Monastery"), were the two focal points in this region, around whom a number of hermits and their disciples began to cluster in the middle of the fourth century, thus necessitating the establishment of communal rules and the erecting of the physical structures of a coenobium. Shenoute provides us with one brief but striking

<sup>15</sup> W.E. Crum, "Inscriptions from Shenoute's Monastery," *Journal of Theological Studies* 5 (1904) 552-569, at 555-556 (no. A2). However, the same inscription, according to Crum's restoration, seems to place Shenoute's death in 454, which I do not believe to be correct. The reading and interpretation of both dates in the inscription are uncertain, but the birth year is the more secure of the two (see Crum's notes on 556 and his introductory comments on 552 and 553-554).

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<sup>16</sup> Shenoute, *Canon 1*, XC 30, ed. Leipoldt, *Opera* (n. 3 above) 3:207:22-26. Shenoute addresses the community as "you," feminine singular, that is, *tycymawt* "the community" or "the congregation" (see further below, at n. 23).

<sup>17</sup> *Canon*, XB 43:17-11:16 (FR-BN Copie 130<sup>e</sup> f. 89r, unprinted); *εδαζερατц зпгоуиште едаш пппахε πппоуε εαζουε εζουи зппεαζε*; *εβρεуишоуиштцаде едаш евеиεскаε зхпгпεадеиε*; *хеоуоi пдi пдппре оуоi пдi пдснпг*; *оуоi пдi псгнвоуе ппдх пппоуε птхууагко*; *пн псгазхуе пппоуε птхадхуоуε пε зппгснпгпхуагпгц псгш εвоа дн псгппоуахε εаζоуиштε*.

<sup>18</sup> *Canon 1* XC 60:1.21-26, ff. 4-10, ed. Henri Munier, *Manuscriptis coptes* (Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du musée du Caire), nos. 9201-9304; Cairo 1916) 104. Unfortunately, nothing has been transmitted to us of such records from the earliest years of the monastery's history.

<sup>19</sup> On the structure and organization of the "White Monastery federation", see Bentley Layton, "Social Structure and Food Consumption in an Early Christian Monastery: The Evidence of Shenoute's *Canons* and the White Monastery Federation A.D. 385-465," *Museon* 115 (2002): 25-55, at 26-29.

early on is shown by the rules that were in force under the monastery's second father, and which probably go back to Peol's himself. The fourteen surviving rules are all formulated according to the following pattern: "Cursed is any man who does such-and-such," or "Cursed is any woman who does such-and-such," or "Cursed is anyone who does such-and-such ... whether young or old, father or son, man or woman."<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, Shenoute records that Peol's successor took responsibility for consecrating the women's eucharistic bread,<sup>21</sup> and Shenoute himself regarded it as a part of his responsibility from the beginning of his own tenure as father of the monastery to regulate the women's life exactly as he did the men's. Whatever was laid down for the life of the community was laid down for one and all, whether great or small, whether man or woman.<sup>22</sup>

These two communities, then, together with a second men's community (perhaps the "Red Monastery" founded by Pshoi?), constituted — already during the first years of Shenoute's tenure — a kind of monastic federation, which Shenoute referred to either collectively as "this community," or more precisely as "these communities."<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, hermits continued to live in isolation in the surrounding desert, in some kind of loose association with the main monastery, such that they were welcome, and even expected, to assemble together with the monks in residence in the monastery at appointed times of the year. In fact, Shenoute himself spent most of his life as one of those hermits, directing his communities by means of male elders who functioned as intermediaries, carrying written communications back and forth as necessary.

[illegible]

<sup>21</sup> *Canon 2*, XC 221, ed. Rubin *Besa* (n. 59 below; cf. n. 14 above) 117-27-118-2 (instead of n in line 28,  $\eta\alpha$  is expected;  $\eta\eta\epsilon\kappa\epsilon\iota\mu\tau$   $\eta\tau\acute{\alpha}\lambda\omega$   $\eta\alpha\iota$   $\epsilon\tau\epsilon\eta\iota\alpha\kappa\omega\kappa$   $\chi\eta\mu\iota\tau\alpha$   $\lambda\iota\kappa\iota\kappa\iota\kappa\iota\tau\alpha$  "our other father, who died recently" is Shenoute's immediate predecessor).

<sup>22</sup> See Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women* (n. 60 below) chap. 5, "They Too Are Our Brethren": Gender in the White Monastery."

<sup>23</sup> Layton, "Social Structure and Food Consumption" (n. 19 above) 26-27 nn. 7-9. Layton prefers to translate *synagoga* in Shenoute's mouth by "congregation" rather than by "community" or (literally) "synagogue."













the Lord and his angels and his saints: that multitudes honor us outside, but we ourselves commit countless evil acts deserving of scorn."<sup>50</sup>

But if the community was really so rife with sin as this statement and many similar statements suggest, then what was so surprising or so special and so grievous about that one sinful act that Shenoute felt he had to reveal to the monastery's father? What little we know about the series of events leading up to Shenoute's letter indicates that the incident in question did have a special status and set in motion an unusual train of events, which means that we should understand all the other generalized statements about sin in the community as rhetorical exaggeration on Shenoute's part, probably reflecting a relatively constant series of minor transgressions — missed prayers, pilfered bread, non-regulated conversation, negligent handling of books in the library — an accumulation of infractions that nonetheless paled in comparison to the grave transgression of which Shenoute became so painfully aware.

But then, why exaggerate these relatively minor transgressions, which might only have the effect of reducing the perceived gravity of the main incident at issue? I think Shenoute would never have agreed with any suggestion that the one sin was in principle no worse than any of the others, for it involved the corruption of one person by another, apparently the corruption of one or more novices by their superior. That is a terrible thing, like the scars that are left on the psyche of a person who is a victim of violence. But nevertheless, ultimately it is one and the same thing that is at stake in all sinful acts: the risk of eternal damnation. Let us take seriously the formulation of the Rule of Pcol, which was an important part of Shenoute's spiritual monastic inheritance: "Cursed is anyone who ..." Not just "don't do it," but: know that you are cursed if you do it. And what does it mean to be "cursed"? It means to be condemned to eternal punishment before the judgment seat of God. A sinner's only hope is to repent during this life, and even that is no guarantee of salvation on Judgment Day, when account must be rendered to God of every word uttered and every deed done during the whole of one's life.

<sup>50</sup> Canon 1, XC 18-19, ed. Leipoldt, *Opera* (n. 3 above) 3:199:7-22.

Did the father of the monastery and the monks under his direction not understand this? Apparently not. Several of Shenoute's statements give us a clue to the current attitude toward sin in the monastery. For example, Shenoute asks, "What makes you think that everyone who lives in any community in accordance with your way of life will be saved?"<sup>51</sup> That the reigning idea in the community was that they would all be saved by virtue of being monks is indicated in a more specific and interesting fashion by the monastery's father, whom Shenoute quotes as having said to him during their last interview: "Enough! I have built them the wall."<sup>52</sup> To which Shenoute replied sadly, "Did I tell you that they (the sins) passed within to them (the sinners) from outside? Rather, Satan is inside the wall, with his hands full of weapons, with which they (the sinners) are doing violence to themselves."<sup>53</sup> But the father of the monastery believed that an enclosing wall would keep sin out, protecting the innocent monastic paradise within. Had the interview lasted but a little longer, Shenoute records, he and his superior might have come to blows.<sup>54</sup> Shenoute, like his Latin-speaking contemporary some 2,600 kilometers away in North Africa, had a darker and much more grim understanding of sin than many of his contemporaries. He compares it to a deep pit, for example, out of which it is impossible to escape without help from above. And yet when help is offered, the ones in the pit try instead to pull the helper down into the pit along with them.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Canon 1, XC 60:ii.24-29, ed. Munier, *Manuscripts coptes* (n. 18 above) 104.

<sup>52</sup> Canon 1, YW 77:i.18-20 (FR-BN Copte 130<sup>3</sup> f. 1r, unpublished): *cepwage alkwit epoww hncort*.

<sup>53</sup> Canon 1, YW 77:i.24-ii.8 (FR-BN Copte 130<sup>3</sup> f. 1r, unpublished): *nh ntaxoooc nak xegntayowute e2oyh epoww ziboa xhnhon pcatanac netihoyh hncort epeneqax me2 hncorteq hnhw eyxi hnooy hkonc hnh hnooy eola ptootoy oyaxtoy* (for the direct continuation, describing the chief offender and his followers, see n. 27 above).

<sup>54</sup> Canon 1, YW 77:i.6-17 (FR-BN Copte 130<sup>3</sup> f. 1r, unpublished): *hnhoyoww alaa akpkefexaxe epoi xaxixw nak hnapoxne zwc wihw ayw neparakeoyi ne hteoyhwe wihw hnhenehy zoycon*, "You did not want to, but you even became my enemy, because I gave you my advice like a son; and a little longer and a fight would have broken out between us."

<sup>55</sup> Canon 1, YG 129:i.13-ii.2, ed. Alla I. Elanskaja, *The Literary Coptic Manuscripts in the A.S. Pushkin State Fine Arts Museum in Moscow (Vigiliae Christianae Supplements 18; Leiden etc. 1994) 235*; Shenoute had already

I cannot continue on this occasion to present Shenoute's first letter in detail. In order to conclude, let me return to the narration of events. The second half of the first volume of Shenoute's *Canons* is a second open letter to the community, the surviving contents of which make it clear that it was not necessary in the end for Shenoute to sever his ties with the monastery entirely as he had intended.<sup>56</sup> For, a second incident of grievous sin could not be covered up, and with its discovery came the recognition that Shenoute really was a man gifted with special insight.<sup>57</sup> Thus

begun to develop his image of the pit of sin earlier in this work, XC 19-21, ed. Leipoldt, *Opera* (n. 3 above) 3:200-4-201:8.

<sup>56</sup> Sadly, the beginning of this second letter is also wanting. Almost certainly it falls in the lacuna between XB 152 and XC 111 (FR-BN Coptic 130<sup>f</sup> f. 96v and 130<sup>f</sup> f. 43r respectively, both unpublished). A long section of this work comprises a series of allegories in which Shenoute envisions his own and the sinners' actions: in YG 172-XC fig. 1c (ed. Amélineau, *Géaves* [n. 28 above] 1:445-460), note the sections introduced by τὸν αἰῶνα ἡμεῖς ἐστὶν εὖ καὶ ὡς αὐτοὶ καὶ οἱ ἁμαρτωλοὶ (YG 174, 175, 177-178, 184, XC fig. 1b, 1c). These allegories are the "vivid omens" that Schroeder has described briefly in "Purity and Pollution" (n. 26 above) 145-146, summing up the "core problem" that they "illuminate" as "the presence of particularly sinful monks ... rendering] the monastery as a whole vulnerable to the devil's work." She concludes (146): "It appears that the corrupting acts of some members have placed the whole community under God's condemnation. For Shenoute, the monk who leaves his or her body open to the presence of another renders the entire community open and vulnerable to sin and evil. Sexual activity allows the devil to enter not only the individual monastic body but also the corporate monastic body. Now the collective group faces damnation because of its failure to address its polluted members" (see further Schroeder's recently completed doctoral dissertation, cited in full in n. 60 below). No less important for the further analysis of this section of *Canon* 1 is to recognize that a reconstruction of the events that precipitated both the letters in the volume depends to some extent on the correct decipherment of these allegories in concrete (auto)biographical terms.

<sup>57</sup> *Canon* 1, YG 173-174, ed. Amélineau, *Géaves* (n. 28 above) 1:446:8-15. Shenoute's formulation of his thoughts here seems rather careless and is therefore difficult to follow exactly, but I think he meant to say something like the following (correcting Amélineau's reading of YG 174:1.3 to εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ οὐκ ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ etc. [collated in Oxford, March 2001]): "If you (the community) had not seen, at another (former) time, by the agency of this person's (Shenoute's) speech, acting on a command from God, a part of yourself having perished in their own impurity and pollution, then you would also not be inclined to believe him with regard to what he says now. For also at that (former) time you mistrusted his words until you saw with your eyes

revealed as a prophet, a strict ascetic, a learned man, and even a writer, the earlier notion that he might want to be the monastery's leader became more earnest. But Shenoute was disgusted by the community's previous treatment of him, and his response to their new admiration was: "Not only does this person (Shenoute) have no desire for what you are considering in your foolish heart, which speaks (nothing but) foolishness, but not even the Lords ministering angels want to get near you."<sup>58</sup>

But whether he wanted it or not, whether he continued to live in the monastery or instead made good on his vow to withdraw more deeply into the desert, he did soon take over responsibility for the communities and became their third father. And here begins the career of "Shenoute the Archimandrite," with which students of Egyptian monasticism may already be familiar — more or less. The documentation for the first three years of Shenoute's career as father of the monastery is contained in volume 2 of his *Canons*, and here several texts previously attributed to Shenoute's successor Besa must now in fact be reinterpreted as works of Shenoute from this very early period.<sup>59</sup> This second volume of Shenoute's *Canons* offers some surprises of its own, especially to do with Shenoute's handling of his perceived responsibility for the women's community. His difficulties in this regard — and apparently he had some severe difficulties — are the subject of a recent monographic study by a young American scholar of ancient Christianity, Rebecca Krawiec,

those whom the Enemy killed, and just so do you mistrust his words (on the present occasion). If you had heeded his advice (on the former occasion), you would also have seen the others who remained among you in sin, and you would have been amazed at them, and you would have realized that your ascetic labor and theirs has been in vain." That some — but not all — of the sinners had been exposed and severely punished on the (a?) previous occasion is indicated also by a passage in the first work in *Canon* 1, XC 22, ed. Leipoldt, *Opera* (n. 3 above) 3:201:21-202:11 (cf. Layton, "Social Structure and Food Consumption" [n. 19 above] 50 n. 108).

<sup>58</sup> *Canon* 1, YG 220:ii.2-15 (FR-BN Coptic 130<sup>f</sup> f. 46r, unpublished): οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ ἀλλ' ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἐστὶν ὁ ἀσκητής· ὁ ἀσκητής δὲ ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἐστὶν ὁ ἀσκητής· ὁ ἀσκητής δὲ ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἐστὶν ὁ ἀσκητής.

<sup>59</sup> See n. 14 above. The relevant "fragments of Besa" that I attribute instead to Shenoute are Kuhn's nos. 36, 37, 42, and 43 (K.H. Kuhn, *Letters and Sermons of Besa* [2 vols.; Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 157-158 (Copt. 21-22); Louvain 1956] 1:117-126, 131-133; 2:113-120, 124-126).

whose work is based in part on as yet unpublished Shenoute fragments.<sup>60</sup>

Together, the first two volumes of Shenoute's *Canons* shed remarkable light on a critical period in the history of an early Christian monastery, namely the transition from the first generation to subsequent generations. In this case, as it happened, leadership of the monastery fell to an extraordinary personality, who canonized his own writings from this period of transition for the benefit of those who would come after him. Through these writings we come to know a man who suddenly emerges as one of the most striking figures in the history of Egyptian monasticism, whose career as a monastic leader we can follow across eighty years. Already at the beginning of this career, or even before the beginning, as we may say, certain characteristics that mark this figure stand out in sharp relief, in particular his unassailable self-understanding as a prophet in the mold of the great prophets of the Old Testament. He himself, at least, must have become aware of this innate mantle of authority draping his shoulders long before he chose to display it publicly in a confrontation with the leadership of his monastery. And then his chosen mode of display is also telling: he wrote a prophetic book, in Coptic. Surely this was not the first time that he put pen to papyrus in order to fix his own thoughts in writing. By the time he wrote what became the first work in the first volume of his *Canons*, some thirty years of reading, meditating, observing, and probably also writing lay behind him.

I submit that the fixed core of Shenoute's thinking was the belief that each human being will eventually stand before God to

<sup>60</sup> Rebecca Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery: Egyptian Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford 2002). I should mention here also the interesting recent doctoral dissertation by Caroline T. Schroeder, "Disciplining the Monastic Body: Asceticism, Ideology and Gender in the Egyptian Monastery of Shenoute of Atripe" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University 2002), a copy of which I first saw after I had already delivered my paper at the symposium in Rome. Schroeder's second chapter ("Ascetic Discipline and Monastic Authority: Shenoute's Earliest Letters to the Monastery") is an analysis of Shenoute's *Canon 1*, focusing on her thesis that "permeating Shenoute's writings is a conviction that for the individual monk to maintain a holy state, the entire community must be free from sin and corruption" (24; cf. n. 56 above).

be judged for all eternity. Condemnation to eternal punishment is a fate to be avoided at all cost, and since there is no way to guarantee the opposite reward, each person must strive constantly to do his or her very best here on earth not to incur the irrevocable wrath of God. The monastic life is an effective means to this end, but only if the monastic life is lived correctly. By publicly donning the role of prophet, Shenoute laid claim to an authoritative voice that could lead the monks along the most likely path to salvation. In contrast to his immediate predecessor, whom he depicted as an excellent model, but a failure as a leader, Shenoute himself became an outsider, the voice crying in the wilderness, not to be imitated, but to be heeded. How such a figure functioned as the leader of an increasingly large and complex society as Shenoute's monastery became, is one of the most intriguing topics that students of Shenoute's writings have to pursue. Questions relevant to this topic arise already when one begins to consider the first work in *Canon 1*. For example, how did Shenoute "publish" this tremendously long "open letter"? And how did he manage to reply so quickly, with a second lengthy open letter, to a situation that seems to have changed rapidly after he wrote his first letter? I do not pretend to know the answer to these questions, let alone to other such questions that might follow from them. I freely admit that there is still a great deal in these earliest of Shenoute's writings sorely in need of elucidation.

But first, before even what I have ventured to offer in the present paper can be properly evaluated by others, and its subject as thoroughly explored as it deserves to be, we need an edition and translation of *Canon 1*. Indeed, by now the impression might well have been formed that there is a need for a complete edition of all Shenoute's works according to their current state of reconstruction, which is far advanced beyond what Johannes Leipoldt and Émile Amélineau were able to achieve in their unfinished editions from the beginning of the last century.<sup>61</sup> I am pleased to be able to announce on this occasion that such a project of edition has begun. Under my general editorship, a small, international team of Coptologists has undertaken to edit and translate, first, the nine volumes of Shenoute's *Canons*, and then the volumes of

<sup>61</sup> See Emmel, "Editing Shenoute" (n. 9 above) 109-110.

*Discourses* and other works.<sup>2</sup> We hope that the first volumes of our edition might appear during the next several years, so that students everywhere where there is an interest in the history of monasticism will soon be able to become better acquainted with this extraordinary figure from the earliest period of the Christian monastic tradition: Shenoute the Archimandrite, who of course began his career as Shenoute the monk.

## COPTIC MONASTIC LITERATURE: THE FORGOTTEN NAMES \*

TITO ORLANDI

Like every human being, a monk is made up of soul and body. That is why, when we investigate the memories of past monks, we refer to what remains of their spiritual activity but also of their material presence in the world: written documents, from one side, and archeological monuments, from the other. In the case of many of the Egyptian monks, this works smoothly. We can see the ruins of Pachomian monasteries (in the region of Hou = Diospolis Parva),<sup>1</sup> and we have the text of some literary works of Pachomius<sup>2</sup> together with the lives of him and of his successors. We can see the monastery of St. Antony (near the Gulf of Suez),<sup>3</sup> and we have the text of his letters and of his life (written, according to trusted opinion, by the great Athanasius).<sup>4</sup>

\* Peculiar abbreviations are at the end of the paper.

<sup>1</sup> On the archaeology of the Pachomian monasteries, cf. Louis Théophile Lefort, *Les premiers monastères pachômiens. Exploration topographique*, Le Muséon 52 (1939) 379-407; Ägypten, Archiv für Orientforschung 27 (1980) 281-316; Gary Lease, *The IV Season of the Nag Hammadi Excavation, 21 December 1979 - 15 January 1980*, GM 41 (1980) 75-85; Bastiaan van Elderen, *The Fourth Season of the Nag Hammadi Excavations*, ARCE Newsletter 111 (1980) 25-26.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. L.Th. Lefort, *Œuvres de S. Pachôme et de ses disciples*, Louvain, Secrétariat CSCO, 1956, CSCO 159, 160; Amund Boon, *Pachomiana Latina*, Louvain, Bureaux de la Revue, 1932, Bibliothèque de la Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Ample photographic evidence in Massimo Capurri, *Egitto copto*, Milano, Jaca Book, 1999, 119 ss.; cf. P. van Moorsel, *Deir Anba Antonius veertien jaar na mijn eerste campagne*, in: C. Fluck et al., *Divinitae Aegypti. Koptologische und verwandte Studien zu Ehren von Martin Krause*, 214-222, Wiesbaden, Reichert, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> S. Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Origenist Theology, Monastic Tradition and the Making of a Saint*, Lund, Lund University Press, 1990; L. Cremaschi, S. Atanasio, *Vita di Antonio. Apoftegmi. Lettere*, Roma, Edizioni

<sup>22</sup> The team members apart from me are: Helke Behlmer (Göttingen), Anne Boud'hors (Paris), Bentley Layton (New Haven), Tito Orlandi (Rome), Frederik Wisse (Montreal), and Dwight W. Young (Chicago). See further Layton, "Social Structure and Food Consumption" (n. 19 above) 25-26; Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus* (n. 1 above), "Preface." My own assignments in the project include *Canons* 1 and 2.

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ANALECTA MONASTICA 8

# IL MONACHESIMO *tra* EREDITÀ e APERTURE

Atti del simposio  
"Testi e temi nella tradizione del monachesimo cristiano"  
per il 50° anniversario  
dell'Istituto Monastico di Sant'Anselmo  
Roma, 28 maggio - 1° giugno 2002

A cura di  
MACIEJ BIELAWSKI e DANIEL HOMBERGEN

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